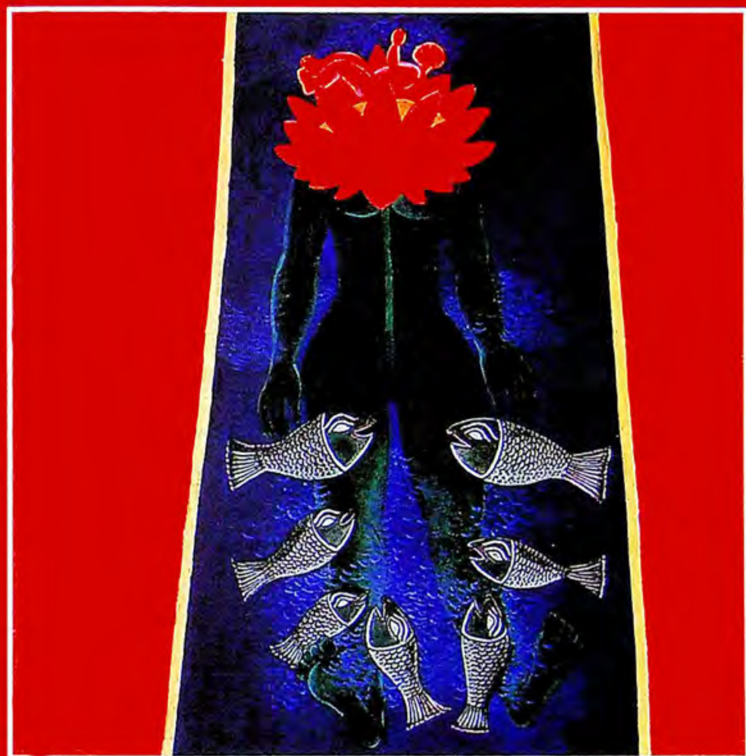
A TIME OF RISING



Pratibha Satpathy

Jayanta Mahapatra is a renowned poet of the country, writing poetry in both English and Oriya language for several decades. His poetic contributions have been acclaimed both in India and abroad and won for him the 'Chicago Poetry Award', the 'Central Sahitya Academy Award' and many more laurels.

He lives in Tinikonia Bagicha, Cuttack-1, Orissa and edits an English literary journal *Chandrabhaga*. His English rendering of Pratibha Satpathy's poetry collection '*Adha Adha Naksyatra*' into '*A Time of Rising*' is a brilliant and endearing work.

ISBN 81-241-0907-9 **Rs 150**

A TIME OF RISING

A TIME OF RISING

Pratibha Satpathy

Translated from Oriya by
Jayanta Mahapatra



HAR-ANAND
PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD

HAR-ANAND PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD
F-1211, Chittranjan Park, New Delhi-110 019
Tel.: 51603490 Fax: 26270599
E-mail: haranand@mantraonline.com

Cover: Dr. Dinanath Pathy, The Renewal, Acrylic, 90 × 90 cms.
Design: Dr. Dilip Kumar Tripathy

Published by Ashok Gosain and Ashish Gosain for
Har-Anand Publications Pvt Ltd

Printed in India by Taj Press

To
Writer Paramita
and
Artist Purnachandra

Drop of Myself Between the Unwritten Lines...

What can be told about poetry, that too, about one's own poetry, one's own creativity? This relationship of mine with poetry, is a very long one. Even in childhood while playfully touching the words, inconsistently I got trapped in their mystery ..The butterflies in the banana grove, puzzled me, the fragrance of the unknown flower in the bushes, overwhelmed me for a while, or with stunned disbelief I fixed my tearful gaze on the dead child of some beggar woman. That was when I was a girl.

While my growing consciousness was imbibed with the literary and cultural sensibility of my grandfather, the renowned linguist and compiler of "the Oriya lexicon" Shri Gopal Chandra Praharaj, the soft humming of my mother of the lucid melancholic Oriya songs, had aroused my adolescent fascination for rhymes and rhythms.

By the time I joined Ravenshaw College as a first year science student, I was already regarded as a young poet by my professors and fellow students. What a wonderful experience it was! As if I was flying in the sky! But just as the happiness of young love matures into a bundle of sorrowful bliss, in the same way, my intense interaction with words kept reaching an unfathomable depth. An intense pain arose and from time to time got transferred into a feeling of absolute bliss. Pain and happiness embedded into each other and I set forth on the quest of my own identity in poetry.

Stretched before me, was the long and rich tradition of Oriya poetry starting from the ages of Sarala Das and the vast expanse of Oriya language with immense word-power. After that, every expression became a test for me—a very intricate test. A poem appeared to me as an arrow of words, ready to pierce its target. The fire of expression continued to burn inside me incessantly. Most probably poetry took birth from the artistic courage and power of that expression and reflected itself as embodiment of life's endeavours.

The experience of life with all its pain , pleasure, torture and betrayals, came to me with intensity. All these together were a drop of tear between the unwritten lines of my poetry.

I do not know how far my readers were moved. Did they, in that drop of tear discover the unfulfilled pleasure of the soul? Did they find the flashes of their own sadness or any confidence to overcome that sadness? I do not know for sure, but always I had a faith that my poetry was meant for that.

How one defines 'faith' in the realms of poetry? The poet's faith is not enough here. It has to be linked with the faith of the readers. In this process, poetry has lost much of its readership. This is because, poetry has become suggestive, sometimes an invocation, sometimes made of silence. For constructing poetry out of silence and infusing life into it, often the poet has to occupy the place of the creator. A poet cannot explain in what way the chemistry of poetry is made-mixing what proportion of dream and imagination to reality. Surely, a fraction of this creative process remains out of poet's reach. While expressing my own relationship with poetry, I feel I would be sitting in front of a huge canvas hanging from the sky. I would be

competing with that great artist who paints that canvas with his extraordinary brush. I feel, I would also be painting that canvas with real rivers, real forests, real moonlit nights. I would be choosing and discarding words at my own will. I would be giving birth to poetry that has so far remained invisible in the space and in the process, soaking myself in blood, but, getting overwhelmed with the deep satisfaction of achieving the desired.

That is all dream. But the reality around is totally different, full of violence, terror and disillusions. No poet of our time can escape this. The reality creates its own dream and from that dream is created the realm of poetry .Throughout, the poetic process I have experienced, in my life, I have only tried to comprehend and assimilate this interplay of dream and reality in my own way.

For every poet, poetry is an endless endeavour, a *Tapasya*. But there is no expectation of any gain, any salvation. It is an endless process of evolution, an experience of blossoming continuously, an act of uniting oneself with the earth and its essence.

Pratibha Satpathy

Contents

So Much Has to be Done

One has to return time and again
with the incredible speed of memory-light
and touch the necklace
woven with a million raindrops
that hung once around my neck.

One has to examine too
the strands of hair that were torn
during the frenzied exchange of kisses,
probe those many promises
given and not given,
the vows kept and broken.

For I am not
simply this present of mine where I am
but an adorned, noble past
in between successive moments;
yet, singularly uncommon for all time.

From a mere glance
the dying mother's eyes are riveted
on the pallid paper-like face
One has to tear with nail and claw
the braided waters of the Kuakhai River*

**Local river near the city of Bhubaneshwar.*

like stripped, naked thighs
one has to throw a palmful of rage
onto the pride, unmoved like a stone
and face varied agonies,
then pluck a few stars
to embellish the coiffure
of a pretty girl beating her head
in the hope of indefinite happiness.

In a totally unwarranted way
one has to drag by the hand and bring near
the desire walking past
a little distance away.

When the flow of blood of martyrs
pierces conscience like an adze
one has to hold on to stillness
in a tight embrace.

So many things have to be done
like installing lamps in vacant lots
one for the darkness, the other for the light
walk upto the boundary of the forest
until the moon sets.

One has to return time and again
still, one has to move on ahead,
come back once more.

Words Unsaid

Deep down
in the dark heart of the earth
a word is restless in despair

Unable to free itself
immovable under some command
or just answering to its uncertain whims?

My heart's desire
is to shout the word out loud
in the middle of the street
but decide to be silent,
not to talk words of seeming wisdom
in the market-place

Because I can't speak
in my effort is sharper,
this penance of the word-machine
alongwith the whetted hopes
the word goes around
heaven, earth and hell
only to return, falling starlike
to turn to stone

It waits expectantly
for a dream of some artist
who provokes the sunlight
seated on a high tree branch,
legs dangling,
at times hanging like a beehive
from the mountain's shoulder,
like an *'apsara'* in limbo
in a gathering of *'asuras.'*

At times the earth sits up
at midnight, gropes about
and the unwilling word stumbles
on its way to whisper in the sky's ears,
getting stuck in the throat,
while the earth accepts defeat,
even though blood keeps dripping down

Just because one isn't able to speak out,
there is so much melancholy, so much delight.
silence too, and so much screaming
so much humility and arrogance
so much rage —
all those unnecessary words
becoming the excitement of the poem.
curse and repentance all
going hand in hand to be present
in the dance of abandon of failure

Is life made up
in its inability to speak out?
For right from the beginning
of creation till the day
of final annihilation
it has no freedom at all;
truly, is that word
I have never been able to speak
only me?
Fitful and restless all night
just beside the earth's heart?

Dew Drop

Awakening,
the tender green was around me,
in my moth-eaten body
a dew-drenched untainted scent
quivered away.

Stars.....
like an alphabet in the sky
were being snuffed out one by one;
someone was wiping it clean with eager hands.

Today there are no more walls, no roofs.
Everywhere around me,
my fate, like a smouldering log of wood
now invisible—
it was already dawn by the time I awoke—
a little darkness clung on still.
I don't remember having worn fresh flowers
last night,
how can I then account for this garland
now around my neck?

Where have they all gone,
where are they hidden. ...

my lovelessness, my unbelief, my impatience
I've known so well since birth?

Like a smile or a pearl or a raindrop
the unfamiliar words fall from my lips;
what a glorious tryst with the bashful breeze
Was rebirth ever feasible
in the passing of a single night?

My oil-slick braids, loosened,
now lie spread across my breast,
what is it that sway in the soft breeze
over my right arm?
A peacock feather? Whose is it?
Where has it come from ?
Will I call out to time?
Entreat the night
not to end, not to end at all—
an hour's wait will not make the earth still.

I'll beseech the sun—
to wipe off just for once
these truth and dream lines of mine,

I'll implore my friend not to smile
or to eye me with mistrust.

What a strange room is this...
neither walls nor roof;

what an uncommon touch. ..
neither body nor voice;
what a strange dream
that can neither be explained nor told .

Such an obvious souvenir
that it cannot be treasured;
like a dewdrop, real, lucid,
and yet waiting for sunlight
to wipe it off after-a-while .

Take Away All This Success

I am deep well;
and you, a sprinkling of moonlight
over my still, tranquil waters.

With what tenderness do you step down;
or is it because I stay concealed
that you come to search for me?
will you be able to fathom ever
the well's muteness, its aloneness?

Look—
in an instant
the universe becomes
possible within myself,
stars, planets, the sky and the Milky way
in a stilled reflection;
as this enternity hidden behind the clouds
glimmers,
the frail well-mouth,
moss and grass in the cracks,
shimmering
like the helpless confines
of my toad-like self.

There, look—
an entire lifetime
is riveted to this instant,
those intense dreams all
the endless skyline of desire
are changed into a point
in the tender depths of the moon.

In my commonplace breast
the deeper deeps
are the layers of sand,
the ridiculous search
for life's meaning until today
is glorified further,
casting reflections at your caress.

Here, to you
I offer all my successes
of this instant.

So, Let Us Return

So, we should return, you say,
To the same river bank?
A thick mist
would have blanketed both shores
The Mist on the water
like a creeper,
everything would be sodden in mystery
like one's soul.

The mist slants upward
unsure a wisp of sunlight
I, You
and the warmth quivering inside me
on which morning
and in which continent
shall we stay behind?

We'll build a house of dust
In the newly-come spring
your crown is made
of mango blossoms, my jewellery

We shall step upon a glistening corpse of riches
and fame

If the sun draws
a few lines
In the earth's face
come, let us splatter around
the tenderness of a young planet–
free Man
from the dark tunnel of the earth,
and touch a magic wand
at the grave of his dreams.

Then we will ask the planets, who revolve
endlessly riding
the wings of God's desire
to come to the noisy bed
of the exuberant stream,
give the food grains to a million birds

so we should go back
we will turn our backs
to the mist
that is simply dispersing
in the middle of the paddy field
and move forward,
pick up a large share–
of those griefs too,
being shared by different beings,
suffering as we go along.

No Words in Particular

Forget
whatever I've said.

I haven't told you
anything in particular.

Just think, if I could
wipe off the mist
from the absent minded call of some bird
flying mindlessly through the moonlight,
stretch forward my shoulders and arms
for the tearful breeze to rest itself

But no, suddenly
if I painted these feet that had taken
a single step a provocative red
or even offered a palmful of flowers,
would these affirm
that something new had been done?

If I did open the front door
for the traveller
who had stepped onto the veranda
soaking wet in the heavy rain,

if I did put down a few crosses and zeros
in between the words
twinkling like stars,
would I have built something concrete?

The whole world dazzled
in the dance of the momentary lightning,
when it sounded its music
I held on to the glow worms
in my cupped palms–
maybe I have
wiped off my tears and severed limbs
on the shoulders of the scorched seasons,
maybe my trembling, eager hands
have stroked the blood-stained trees,
but does it mean
that some benevolent desire of mine
has come to pass in someone
I have ordained to be reborn?

That is why
I ask you to forget,
for those words are better unsaid-
Don't pick truth and lies
from whatever I've said at times
in those moments of my despair.

The Noose of Dust

Please make me forget,
the day of his coming,
tell him, not today,
some other day maybe,
at the time of another sunset
with the colours of my mad longing
in the middle of the pool of red lilies
or in the reflection in the scarlet beads
scattered on the floor,
tell him to weave his eagerness.

For I have dragged myself away
tearing myself from everyone around me
kept myself hidden under layers or sand
lest his call fall on my ears,
and his restless, quick fingers
touch my lasting regrets.

How stupid of me to have kept walking
all my life on the razor's edge!
We'll write down our million dreams
on the heart's small slips of paper,
bury them in the earth,
then, on fragments of the wind

arrange our tears in rows
and let them fly away!

In the coiffure of noon or midnight,
at that instant of
effulgence of a blooming simul,*
I have to step out
attired in the loose muslin sari of moonlight
as soon as the magician applauds.

And so,
I lean against the open heart of truth,
as I face
the laughing sea
and the foaming teeth of the surf.

Aquiver, the stars
sprout like tender leaves
and ask the fallen, sulking ones:
If a terrible storm somehow
uproots our earth,
where will tears be?
And our dreams?
And where would the blood
be flowing from the words themselves?

* *a red flower*

At Midnight

The glittering star above the hill
has stopped there for a long time
two hands grope around even today
amidst the stars
has anything been lost
anywhere then?

Exactly at midnight
between darkness and solitude
my voice pierces like an arrow
slowly I lift my feet
and stand in the middle of the milky way.

The dawn that picks leaves
in the grove,
the evening that leans
on its weary wings,
the rivers and pools
washing clean the bloodied sky,
startle together
when they hear my voice.

Have you heard my voice?
Why do you grieve then

with bloodshot eyes?
because we aren't together,
There exist so much songs, poetry silhouettes
and such a huge landscape!

Look, times roots
spread over my entire forehead,
fire agonises fire in my heart;
all those songs, breathe the anger,
that we have shared
reach out slowly
towards my heart.

The moon
in the forehead of early morning sky
is a mark of red sandalwood,
lost dreams follow everywhere
like dark shadows,
as a drop of blood falls from the heart
the blood turns into a tear drop,
it turns into passion,
those two pitiless hands
which have gone on making
blood, sap and tears
flow from man and beast,
from even trees and plants
by pelting stones all day,
stretch themselves now
to choke that very passion's throat.

Why don't you
push away the restless storm
and let it rest
in the lap of these south wind?

Why don't you bury
your foolhardiness
in the path of waiting
that lies hidden
under a pile of fallen leaves?

Presence in Absence

Not even two cubits anywhere
not an inch of space in the wide world
to place a hand in another's
to write the invaluable truth
there isn't a mere two fingers of space
on the earth.

A trumpet here or knife there
in the glittering pocket of lies
burnt paper, dried-up ink
no sign of the heart's affections
yet, whatever comes out of the mouth
pours out
unending applause!

In the long road of summer
was he there or not
like a shortened shadow
or a fleeting scent?
Maybe he was,
or else how would
the momentary touch of coolness
trap the sweat of the entire journey,
its distaste?

The filigree of flattery
the many vanities
How many lines of blood
have I drawn
on the patina of my consciousness
Every touch goes on increasing my pain.

As though I am a grave dawn
suspended, heavy with rain
on the shoulder of the hill, in a bough
or else in between two branches
in torn wisp of sky!

Grief and want
have different identities,
Whenever one of them flies in like a dove
to sit on the branch of my consciousness
the ten points of the compass
are enveloped in the cooing of the dove!

This much is true
that I will not be there to search for
the very same two cubits of earth
and the same brief scent—
the shadow would not be seated
in the sunlight's embrace.
The footprints of the sand-crabs
would have wiped away my lifetime
the sea would be striking its head
without recognizing me.
the earth would have forgotten
for I have told him long long back:
"Don't search for me, I won't be there."

Adorn Me

So now, adorn me
in different likenesses, in guile
in the profound rhythms of life
on the forehead, the eyebrows
the cheeks and nose,
in lines of golden letters
write on,
identify
to whom I belong—

Neither old nor new
wipe off the dust
from the radiance of either,
from the hoary deeps
bring out a picture,
build the eloquent light
slipping away from the radiant stars,
break these frail bangles
on the wrists,
fix the bottomless space
on my fingers,
sprinkle life's nectar
so that the inert silence
springs to life.

For in the morning
the stars, falling,
shall settle on the pool
spread out with leaves of the water lily,
the waves will rush to the shore
with the gestures of folk dances,
all colours will vanish
like naphthalene from time's painting box.

And even if it's late,
this momentarily radiant heart of mine
perhaps would or would not be there,
for I have given my word and I shall go.

You say there is no way?
So, sharpen my hands and feet
the envious eyes
the eyes of rage
will lower themselves
For that reason
strike a soft note of understanding
on the scarlet string of my artery.

You say he won't recognize me?
so for that reason
adorn me in varied ways,
forgive all my inadequacies,
open up a spring of love
(either of water or of blood)
so that stone will slowly dissolve

The Kewada Flowers

The kewada* flowers
high up on the mellow shrub
it gives off its sharp scent.

Hidden from the sea's roar
beyond a line of hills
enclosing the wild bushes
it has burst into flower
almost unseen, however
it can be felt.

The king has set forth his drummer
the minister's men
have dashed off
in all four directions
to proclaim:
No flowering for the kewada!
Not a single row of kewada should be there
a million golden lotuses would flower
at the king's order,
alongwith diamonds and pearls—
But beware! Not one
of this wildly growing kewada!

**The scented flower near river or sea.*

More scintillating that the moonrise
the moon was slowly slipping down
with oars of diamonds
More dazzling than the evening star
was the bright Venus,
as though a diamond nose stud
slipped and fell,
and the kewada opened its lips!

She would never answer
never say as to why
so far away, away in dense marshland,
defying the royal order,
amidst brambles and thorns
it has burst into flower.

Like the first utterance of love
like the smell of the earth
like the letters on the dark stone
and the gushing spring in the forest,
unrestrained,
hidden away,
but noticed somehow!

O fair, royal Princess!
Don't tell anyone please
for I could be beheaded—
Look, here I spring up,
Bursting into flower.

The Crown

Haven't you noticed ever
the stain on the crown,
left behind by tears?
Haven't you really?

Torn out of your entrails,
your nostrils and lips,
is this tear; tell me truly,
didn't it glimmer
like a drop of blood?

Day was hidden in night
and night in day,
my feet disobeyed me—
my footsteps fell in the strangest of places,
when I would lose all sense
in trams and buses,
and still you're unable to see
the stain of my tears?

O Emperor,
your pride doesn't crack ever,
it rises up like a balloon
to drift in the sky.

You never acknowledge
this stain left by tears,
and yet, if you could touch just once
this stain on the diamond
of your crown,
the empty sky would yield like butter,
a line of moonlight would descened
from stairs of the void
and fall on the heart of '*Chakora*'*
handful of water would drip down
the roots of this sprig of dry grass,

And the scent of truth
would rush in, to play
in the dim corners of the world's litter,
all those crooked eyebrows of cruelty
like blue-bodied snakes
would cast their sinuous gazes,
and in the heart turned to stone
would be a new quickening
of the blood.

The earth would begin to dance again,
ankle bells ring at the dawn birds' delight,
leaves too, would gesture to one another,
and some word stalled and unexpressed
at the tip of the tongue
would be examined in the king's court—

* *a bird who drinks moonlight.*

O Emperor,
does the crown have any relationship
with blood and breath?
Does the crown have any value
after all debts have been paid
and sleep overtakes one
on the tear-soaked earthen bed?

Don't Sulk

Don't sulk over there, come!

Because you appear to be here
like the breeze, or the scent inside it,
I arise from the frozen pool that I am,
the swan of aspirations unfolds its wings
A drop of sweat and a drop of blood
joy and tears mingle together
the flow in my veins rises and falls.

Come like a rushing waterfall
Come invisible like a song
like a flame lit up in the fire of darkness,
graze through the ashen days of my wanting.

The other day as I stood
invitingly with a crown in my hands
I turned the ground around,
My eyes shut, I drank the poison
in the affections of deceit,
climbing out from the pits of fear,
tenderly I clasped my cupped lotus palms
on the rungs of the ladder of my amazement

when I was a young girl.
From those crafty looks
the trader's greed
the hungering after fame
and the beat of ones own drums,
I have stood aside
since I was a young girl.

Look how the sun topples now
with its red heart
slipping down the hill
Here in the gathering darkness at its foot
I have left each one behind,
to some I've bid farewell
and to some I have not.

Once I suppose I held you close
and it was like holding
mercury in the palm of my hand,
there was nothing I could not do
with the skill of my winged feet,
I held man as close in my heart
as I held both insects and trees.

You abhorred the slippery confines
of one's consciousness,
the glitter of learning, the disguises,
the worn-out mirror—

I knew all this, but then
tell me, for what fault of mine
do you sulk now?

Whether I held you to me or not,
it was just a precarious impression
that had ensnared my entire being,
who knows
whether a whole lifetime would end
with this niggardliness of yours?

These days of mine
are as restless as floating clouds,
the ground of consciousness
resembles the stillness of midnight
with its keen longing
of a forest's hidden spring,
for now I had like to discard—
all my dreams, my consents and refusals.
So come now,
just don't sulk over there, come.

Darkness Isn't All

Just look at your hopes
growing tenderly
like the first stars of twilight,
that darkness isn't all.

The morning will open up
its bright, naked body
from the stifled breathing
of the darkness,
the crouching dove
in the tree bole
will beat its wings
and sow its quickness
across the sky

The little flower will lift its head
from the amassed darkness
inside the crack,
and fear, like
the torn feathers of a broken wing
will drop down—
So much so
that the sun would startle everyone
through the seed lying forsaken

in a pile of litter,
and make the traveller halt in his tracks,
for darkness isn't all.

And if the darkness
has extinguished your name,
write it down somewhere,
if you are taking the path of fire
walk with your head held high,
if your feet are in the mire
hold on
to your trembling soul-spark,
and don't ever wipe away
the blood and tears oozing from the depths.
And if your heart quivers
like a tiny isle
in the vast spread of waters,
don't break down.

This world
merely glitters
with the enchantments of falsehood.
For if you have somehow
lighted upon that pitcher of nectar
in the fleeting dance of a water bubble,
don't think it to be a lie.

Dreams Haven't Ended as Yet

Dreams haven't ended, come
Night's age is still
buoyant, come.
Disbelief lies spread out still,
desert sands in the face of pure thirst,
one can read the letters of defeat
on the face of the tired woman,
that face is not mine

Quite high, is the blue canopy
in whose comer
I've stuck the moon with glue,
for years it has been wanting to set
but I haven't let it go

The earth is soaked
in the turbulent flow of darkness,
still, don't speak your last words-
for there is nothing that is final,
nothing has ended as yet

For I have retrieved
the falling sun from the ashes of sunset,
the whimsical finger of fate

has bent low to touch my forehead,
but like an errant strand of hair
I've swept it aside
again and again

Then,
resting the thin thread of possibility
against the breast of a long lost despair,
I go on saying quietly:
"Be patient, Life. Look at me,
what do I have?
The crown of these words,
the riches and supremacy
that I've gained and lost,
searched for and found again
and haven't been able to hold,
are but a game of quicksilver."

Don't forget still
that there is a deep power
in the rift in my thirst,
there is a fire in my blood
that can set things aflame,
and a radiance,
here too is an overwhelming agitation
in my longing,
as a wisp of possibility
starts to rise
in the beyond of space
where my eyes can never reach

The familiar midnight
startles, flaring up .
someone walking down the milky way
stops suddenly, and says:
Dreams haven't ended as yet,
night's age is still
buoyant, come!

Fire

From the moment sparks flew
from flintstone
it has hung on to my neck,
from that day on the mid-ocean rages in fire,
the dense forest rages too;
aflame in the sun and nebulae
it burns on in my womb
and in my heart.

I realize there is no respite from it.
But mine is a body of burnt earth,
it doesn't bother, for flame or fire.
Once, right in the middle of the street,
unforeseen I held it against myself.
my sari caught fire
the pain sunk deep into my heart's maw.

So often I've come back
dressed loosely in saris of many Colours and prints
stepping gingerly on the steps of many centuries
with my milk-white feet
soaking wet the earth
flinging my eager arms both
to the space around me,

over and over again
I have held this fire close to me
and pain has had me as before.

Then too,
Once it leapt from the skies
in thought and in want,
it kept on burning
all through the night
both in darkness and light,
with eyes like black sea shells
tender red lips like freshly sprouted leaves
half in tears and half in smiles.
the fertile breath of wide rice fields
got burnt in meetings and farewells—
so attractive and yet despondent
burning you when you hold it close
burning you when you let it go,
at times
its ash mingling with water
or with blood.

Please don't ask
for its name or address,
because it never, never
can be possessed by one.

You are There

You are there
and that's enough.
I feel I can touch you
reaching out from midnight's bed.
Your answer comes back
when I call out to you,
I am stupid, I know,
for I can never comprehend your agony!

The torch of a hundred million years
burns on the old old mountain—
a woman, all alone,
shivers in the dark
at the mountain's foot.

And here, on the ocean's bed of sand beach
sleeps the passionate woman—
the insane wind leaps forward,
waking from sleep
the sky, moon and stars
who have dosed off
in the ocean's immeasurable deeps.

I wipe clean
each single scar on my heart
that is enough to erase me
I don't know
how I can forgive
the considerable malice, the innumerable insults
in some moment of intimate understanding.
like a tear drop, I hang,
unstable under my own weight
or at times
whining bright like a medicinal plant
or sometimes I become
the center of a dense forest—
And you, the freshly come season of spring,
what exquisite footsteps you possess!

A Time of Rising

No one is there to search.

Long back
I let the world know
that I am not present anyway.

In any case
I never wish to stand
before the arrogant merchant—
aware that my footsteps would fall
inside the enclosure of a fool's judgment,
inside the darkness of disbelief.

In the mad rush of publicity,
amid the roar of the crowds
who go on beating their own drums,
I never wish
to hear my own name—

Deep in the impenetrable forest
beneath a stretch of hills,
on the blood-stained earth
of the fallen Venus,

the imprint of my feet must be there,
or else
in the city street at midnight
my long hair would be blowing dishevelled
In the lap of the suddenly stilled breeze.

And this solace I possess
would be softly stroking
the fierce desires of those insects
dropping from the street light,
the stain of my tears
would be there
on the tattered tin roofs
of slum dwellings.

My bejewelled ring
would flash fire
in a palmful of emptiness

of a new, milky way
floating down from afar;
here, now, I promise, I' II come back
before the earth closes its eyes.

And to every limb of mine
I will fasten
truth, light and faith
In stone
In necessity

in a sword
inside niggardliness
I'll search for a heart and come—
and in the bloodied eastern sky
I shall dawn like the new day,
I shall arise.

In a Tree's Tenderness

Walking past,
either close by or from a distance,
how meaningful is your glance,
the fingers of leaves spread out, reaching forward,
as your tenderness leaps across
and smears my entire body;
I ask myself: why this caress?

Don't you know
I am the heroine of a hundred thousand misjudgements,
a frail reed
does't even tremble at my orders,
no one's raised hatchet drops
at my desperate entreaties,
my eyelids heavy with desire and fear,
the time carries me further and further away
like the swollen flood waters
pushing the sand piles.
why do you show such fondness
for a lowly one like me?

Listen
perhaps you don't remember
a little girl like your own,

her face, a moon;
with what eagerness
did she sow a seed the other day and quip:
"Here, I warn you! If you don't sprout
by tomorrow, it will surely be your end!"

Leaves from the earth, greenness from leaf,
all this is for tomorrow—
day or night, sun or rain;
as if the tree her soul, the idol of her eye.

And then, from the full pitcher of the sky
poured forth to fill earth's thirsty palms

soaking, trembling everything to its roots
and to touch the heavens
branch after branch extended itself.

Inside the thick enclosure of cloud,
immersed in her pirouettes, the earth-girl
was started one day,
as the six seasons became one:
the tingling rain, the winter's tremor,
spring's wistful passion and the southernly
cool scent.

In that hour of dawn
a girl like your eldest daughter
walked to the tree,

in unknown wonder caressing that body
of tender bark,
hugging it with virginal arms in the purity of love.
From its blood
the perfume and taste of nectar
spread into the pores of my being.

"Really, don't you remember?"

"Such a secret story!"

"And today, after such a long time!"

In the language of silence I declared:
our inevitable relationship is contained therein,
so thick that I turn into a tree
body and soul,
And a heavenly bird flits about my boughs.

My own limbs
forget their coarse identities
and embellish themselves,
to become a sky-reaching,
with flowers and fruits
only for that bird's wishful use.

Ah, do you know that bird?

But let it be—
I'll ask you another day:
"Has it ever perched on your branches?
Have you understood its exalted tenderness ?"
Ah, not today
some other day perhaps.

A Handful of Earth

No earth anywhere.
Such a huge city of concrete
trees and birds and animals made with cement,
but have you seen earth anywhere?
A handful of earth?

The whole day
I've scoured with sunlight
and searched for the earth
the whole night too
I've sprinkled the starlight
and groped about
In the open safes holding gold and money
and in the fringes of the city's tears and smiles
grown senseless in smog and dust,
has anyone seen a little earth?
In the throne of power
is artistry and filigree,
in the attire of embrace
is the wile of greed and lies,
somewhere, huddled in a tree hollow
a fledgling cries,
elsewhere a seed sprouts,

flowers bloom, honey drips,
and trees burst with fruit—
In the belly of a handful of earth
there are immense possibilities, diversities,
so many sighs, so much perturbation,
and the instant startled, is suddenly still.
For who would care to look inside
a handful of earth?

Why would
feet which bloom lotuses of gold each day
look around for a little earth,

Why would someone's chest
drowned in a hundred thousand garlands
fall to the earth in despair?

In this assembly of colours and flavours,
in this fair of gold and silver,
amid this show and flamboyance,
who would ask the price
of a handful of earth?

Snared by the breeze, breaking my home,
in the long shadow of my tears,
I have managed to treasure still
a handful of earth,
throwing away flesh, blood and bone,
fame, luxury and success,

just holding on to a snatch of earth.
To you I'll give away all,
king, minister, soldier,
a palace of concrete,
a pitcher of gold,
the perfume of the lotus,
but don't ask where earth is.

You need earth, don't you?
And you don't need
a palace of concrete, a golden pitcher
and the perfume of the lotus?
Wait then,
I'll give you the handful of earth,
tearing open my heart.

Dream

Before the petals drop
the dream wants to know:
where would it live?

It is greatly embarrassed
in this ongoing war
between gods and demons.

And now
desire's flame has gone out
of the eyelids,
sleep has lost
its deepening,
tears and sighs
are deft in deceit,
it's been long since
longing has been forsaken,
the dream's eardrums have burst
in the clamour of the rich:
how would it live,
where would it set up
its exquisite world?

A dream rises and looks
from the bed of a lily leaf,
a flashing meteor
rushes past the open window,
the spear of light
pierces the heart of darkness.

If one stretches out
a cool hand,
why should the wind bother
to hold it?
If there were a tree somewhere
the dream would rest awhile
in its shade.

If there were atleast one person
enchanted, dream could
hide behind him,
it could have taken refuge in truth
but inside the golden cauldron
truth lies fettered
communication with it, therefore,
is never, never possible.
The dream is groping for
life-now-a-days,
and for a party to be enrolled.

In this fateful war
between gods and demons,

when the nectar is scattered
far and wide,
the earth under the feet
drenched in blood,
in this cataclysmic age
dreams are confused
and tormented
where would they live,
whose side
would they take?

Mother

The same call 'Ma' from every child
the same bubbly laughter
the same mouth overflowing with milk
such a call that gives me a start
when even our errand boy calls out 'Ma!'
As though he were of my blood
and of my tears, and the pains of my womb.

The earth goes on shrinking inside herself
does more honeyed juice overflow
from my body and from my heart?

Still there is no end to my helplessness
distended bellies on stick-like legs
eyes of dead fish
the screams of fear
at the sight of blood
the ill, the blind
millions of hands keep groping with cries of
'Ma, Ma, Earth, Earth!'
This earth rends in two.

When a child sobs
beside the bloodied bodies of its parents

in the corridors of terrorism
at the centre of a burnt, destroyed cenotaph
at the unconscious body of a gas victim

being carried on a stretcher
in the grip of floods, calamities
wars and tyrannies
either in Israel, Sri Lanka or France
or in Bhopal or Delhi
or on the banks of the Birupa* or Mahanadi*
whenever a child cries piteously
wherever,
the hairs of my body stands on end .
a blocked-up sea
builds inside my heart .
to splash and fall
on my face, cheeks and eyelids!

The cowherd, the shepherd
or the boy who has taken a vow
for his scanty homespun loincloth
or for a prison life
or a divine newborn
the father of a new future
a hero, an *avatar*
who would strangle these ogres for all time-
If I could only give shape or form to such a one
to this saviour, this dream-person

* *long rivers flow through Orissa.*

beyond the boundaries of my future; ,
There! He stands and smiles
why doesn't he come near?

If he would just come down
to my womb, into my lap
to my darkness and my pain
and to this intolerable helplessness,
I would pour my own blood
into the blood of the epic Mother
and watch the slow spill of blood
defy the ages to flow on.

Just Like Earth

I am just like you.
Like you, Earth
in all respects, truly. Believe me.

Can't you see
how my heart has splintered
and cracked open
in the intense heat of malice and brutality?

Can't you see too
how, like you
I have been anointed inside many
with the juices of harvest
this, my virtuously whole body?

The world's footfalls
are my due without any crime of mine.

Still then,
I smile, embellish myself in regular routine
exactly as you do
in novel colours and scents
an evening bloom that drops in the morning.

That Hope

Ah, who's coming today?

Since early daybreak
flocks of orioles
flit through
the branches of nearby trees
bursting into melodious calls
Across a dead twig
beyond
the silk gossamer of a spider-web
opens into
a dew-decked Japanese fan
How these principles
drop from my hands
and my heart today
scents in jasmine
It seems as if
no grief, no stain
is secreted in my heart.

Unending clouds
in the sky everywhere
skim past, hiding away
their shadows

in the middle of a pool
tremble and break apart
a dusky voice loosens from the horizon
and stretches itself into my room.

That destiny of mine
which had been sitting snug
like a stone idol for ages
has begun envying me today.
And now it seems as though

I shall have to face an envy
more enormous than that.
Look: how that terrible envy
has torn me away
from every relationship
and from this world of mine
lest I spend a moment or two
inside someone else's love
and with such a thought
forces its love away from me
while its smile taunts me
outside the dark-brimmed courtyard
of my future.

Did the instant bury itself deep
in noble hopes?
My surroundings started melting away
What time was this, what hour

marked not my morning or night or year
or day and month of the calendar?
For even place had lost its direction
was this water or land,
home or sky or wasteland?

Only I remember
like the eager tendrils
of the *'malati'* creeper
my arms outstretched, extended
towards the desired horizon.

Those hopes then:
a momentary heavenly bliss
or perhaps the heart's delight
whose price would be to suffer
age after age of darkness !

Such hope
is but one concern,
a tune
to fill a life with love and compassion.

That very hope
embellished my temporal flesh
with the tiniest jewels
in my stringy unkempt hair
with mythical blossoms
and in the flutes of my bone
could play what mellifluous tunes!

Did the shrubs and trees
know the meaning of this auspicious moment?
Formless is this hope of mine
and waiting without any use
and were they able to measure
its sternness?
So, at this hour,
they behaved as if they were my very own.

Today my destiny
which was used to ill-luck, taunts and wounds
from the beginnings of time
looks on with pity
from moment to moment.
And where
would be that immense possibility
which, at any instant,
like a parakeet's feather
drop down into my thick hair?

For then, from my lips,
an answer appropriate
shall stand upright
to face the many unsolved questions
of the world.

Dawn Wish

Whose veil slips down?
Those flushed cheeks glisten.
But whose?
The breath scattering the drunken bees?
or wan stars falling like night jasmines
from the loosened coiffure
of an astonished *'apsara?'*

With superb artistry
what heavenly dreams
have shaped this *apsara*,
alabaster hands reaching forward
from the horizon,
pearls of honey from cupped palms
strewn across earth and space,
and in the skies the moment takes flight,
fickle, passionate;
and morning shows whenever you look at her face.

Apsara, aren't you my other self?
when I accept you
all beings of this material world disappear,
as unforeseen darkness opens up;
and in the early dawn, among falling dewdrops,

lingers this feeling of being alone.
Startled, the body's illusive grace drops;
in the heart's deeps
a point of light which had fallen asleep
because of its worthlessness
suddenly comes to life,
from its darker depths
slowly grows a column of light.

From its inside
someone flies upward,
merging with your predetermined path;
is that a part of my being?
Its lucent radiance
revealed on all things still and moving,
as innumerable bird calls fill the sky,
the horizon there no more.

And a sombre, intimate voice
strikes my ears:
"How momentous this instant,
as if it were the hour of Birth,
how true!"
Ignorant as I am,
will I be swayed, believing this sorcerous web?

Like an abandoned post stuck in the earth
will my two feet ever play me false?
will the arrogance of the timeless sun be false?

This conceit or creation?
And like a slight, commonplace blade of grass,
this, my diminutive being?
false shall be this hesitant world of mine
which clings to my rib cage.

The darkness spills,
all night long it overflowed,
flowers' pollen and youth's nectar
were coming to an end –
and in the morning, you alone,
your bride-form in every direction,
your many-splendoured youth, flower-bedecked.

Apsara, time freezes at your glances.
In the coral parasols of tender leaves of the mango tree
are your inevitable marks of wounds.

So novel is your cheerless caress
that goose pimples break out of my skin.
'*Apsara*,' when will the time come?
Even night will be there no more
for those incoherent dreams,
for in reality I'll become
one of those familiar mornings,
everlastingly full-bloomed.

To Part, To Unite

Fresh, mist-washed, milk-white morning.
Never, never, did give a hint
Of such a sad, crippling afternoon!
Not even a solitary leaf on a branch
pale yellow ears of rice and grass
lifeless each moth and insect-
Even if men wade in mud and slime
their faces glow with greed and arrogance.

And you ask: how did I spend the afternoon?
I couldn't even put two strands together!
Caught in an inane inability
how I wished
to hug our maid who went about her chores all day
(with her lips clamped shut)
and whisper in her ears:
"Can't you see, how we both
are exactly alike!"

But with an immobile stone wedged against my tongue,
eyes rent open
like the windows of an abandoned castle,
my limbs had all turned wooden,

just mine,
this deadened tree bark,
nothing rare perhaps
which the sun and rain, or the winter-dew could give.

And close to the beating of my heart
was the sound of something
alive, an exquisite breaking apart,
from the confines of diseased silence to my body,
from the body to my soul-
those misapprehensions of my death brought.

Who are you at this hour?
What rights are those,
with whose strength
the powerlessness of my being
stays silent and nameless?

Are you
that changeless, eternal love of mine
resolute, fragrant
fleeing to me in the moment before my death,
to resurrect me perhaps
in dream and tune
in the intimate springs of affection?

Are you a strange shape
of this familiar world
perfect, parallel,
fragmentation and decay never your virtue?

I can never reveal to anyone who you are,
what deep stillness you possess
from the wellsprings of an untouched life!
Uncommon sun
of a pathless sky, wait please-
wait a moment longer,
be witness;
I stand revealed
opening up petal by petal like the lotus,
dispersing scent, charm and liveliness till the
very end,
overcoming my total powerlessness.

For after awhile
like a stubborn brahming kite
this restless afternoon will become bizarre,
to be lost in the skies,
like a swollen bubble
to have burst quietly without a trace.

Witness

In this torrential rain
somewhere still
the parched earth cracks open
and the guest goes back
simmering of thirst,
not a palmful of water is to be found anywhere

In the wooden crown
of the queen who is floating into space
from her throne built of winds,
not a slip of tinsel can be seen anywhere,
there is muck, filth and darkness
under the heart,
masses of crawling leeches and worms,
and still, the world around us
sweats with the *Parijata's* fragrance

Cascades of Sunlight slip down
from the insides of hills of cloud,
in the jungles of Sal
on the beds of fallen leaves
lies asleep the shadow
of rice grains and sesame seeds,
the earth tears open

and someone's cry of despair
stretches forward:
"Don't leave, please !"

Have you seen such a place
where the sun's rays have never fallen
and where
the dream of the *Kadmaba* flower
hasn't broken apart in wonder-
is there a span of earth somewhere
which has not ever been wet
in spite of the heavy rains ?
Here I bear witness
here too I have turned to stone

In spite of so much love
and this total surrender

if someone's heart hasn't melted
if someone's lips haven't quivered
if someone's eyes haven't turned liquid
if someone's blood hasn't leapt up to dance

for I am its sole witness
a witness to the cruelties-
in me
are incised.
who knows how many
twisted alphabets of grief.

True, Yet A Dream

Between truth and dream
there is a surely an umbilical chord
whether you believe it or not,
but without your dreams
life become spiritless,
and how very cruel too!

At times
truth and dream become one
who doesn't know
from a bowl of fermented rice-water
the aroma of jasmine bursts forth?

To be turned to truth,
to live, or even to breathe
dream, trembling with desire
is quite audacious,
but who can deny
its sensuality,
its eagerness to be caressed?

In the face of utter deceit
inside the eye of time that rushes by

like a hurricane,
who can tell where it lies concealed
so that even a terrorist's knife
is unable to strike and kill it?

And truth too, in its loneliness,
becomes restless,
burning out in sheer despair,
and wishes to get past
by anointing itself
with a dream salve of sandalwood.

When the dream comes down
from the early sky of dawn
the waterfall freezes,
wings sprout forth in the heart;
the young girl startles
as she picks the stars
from underneath the coral-jasmine's tree,
and pushes them into her sari's folds,
and a noble lament breaks apart
and soaks the earth.

Look at greed,
growing fully somewhere inside
like a wild creeper
both in you and me,
the measure of imagination or reality
is not enough—

we aren't those who can be dismissed easily
for when the dream is broken
we sit up and grope around the bed,
ascertain of our breath;
perhaps the possibility
would come to pass
and stay alive for all time!

Name

Earth swallows the milk
The colour box has overturned,
there is nothing else to see anywhere
but green!

Yet green leaves fall
the wet earth cannot hold them
nor does it bear their mark—
two birds rub their beaks and
fly away in different directions

Is the storm the one
who, dressed in gold and silver lace
waits for me in the middle of the road,
to lead me by the hand to the bed of flowers,
to the canopy of the void
for there the sobs of fallen leaves
will not be heard,

I will not be there—
but only my name would be written,
soaked wet in the never ending rain
inside the trembling dark heart.

Is it really the fallen green leaf
that rolls about in despair
or a piece of my heart
that has torn off and fallen somewhere?

Who has kept history buried?
Listen, you have no reason to be calm,
for on leaves of brass
you have hoard poetry
in a chest of stone, under the earth.

But if you hear someone's name
amidst the talk of the stars,
it is not yours—
if you can detect someone's presence
in the scent of a drop of rain,
it is not yours.

For I have written down
the same name years ago
with my own blood
in a piece of stone
lying in the corner of my heart—
having suffered the same scent
through the long nights,
having set traps with words
to catch feeling with pain
in my anguished hair roots.

Not a Crossing of Boundaries

Where is the beginning and the end?
The rainbow bobbing up and down . . .

An unknown expanse
opens up in the heart's little inch
the limits of the body are transgressed
the tiny nooses are cut away
the apparent satisfaction of the moment
is pierced and bloodied.

Earth and sky
corner and niche, everywhere
as if indispensable is my presence.

Believe me
complete silence exists there
and yet what strange harmony:
near the sun,
a single tear drop trembles,
the vast helplessness of entire creation
becomes infinitesimal.
At the cataclysm's core
on a finger tip of island,

surrounded by heaps of corpses,
ashes fly in her eyes, stands a shocked little girl
sparklers flower,
her startled breath
caresses a strand of hair
flying like a death-banner,
the world around grows delirious.

These days too, pushing time aside,
unseen, I try to embrace you—
Tell me, I say, closing your eyes playfully
with my hands from behind, who I am,
when you had embellished me
with the sandal marks of kisses
on my fair-skinned forehead.

To arrive
where all limits, all walls
of time, society and the body
are overcome,
to be there, not to be there
under the gazes of everyone
history's happenings both true and false
what one searches for and what one finds
holding on to the pricelessness of values
and letting it go,
then to be alone and abandoned for ever.

New Things

Who would have heard of such a thing!

To measure the agony
holding on to one of the severed pieces
of my heart,
like the wriggling parts
of an earthworm cut into two,
losing the other piece somewhere,
to feed the blood from head and body
to dust and grass
or else to the late sunset—
maybe there is no comparison
there are no letters to be found ever
for such a history.

I will carve letters in new moulds
then stack these in kilns, burn them,
I will extinguish the old.

I'll pull away now
the cloud that shines like a diamond ring
on the sun's finger,
tell me now
whether to clothe

the colours of your joy—
would I bring
an oriole or a parakeet before you?

Maybe time flies
like dust or cotton wool,
like chicken feathers
in the grasp of a cyclone
or else hides
under the soles of the feet,
frightened, like the shadow of noon
or else leaps into the waters
of the 'Birupa' River*
breaking away into bits
like the moon at dawn.

But like a new star,
don't you go on blinking your eyes
don't burn away too, hidden
like a first love,
and don't build an effigy in dust,
proudly addressing her as a goddess.

So many have been lost
or have vanished,
some in their search for riches
while others on the lookout for a throne,

**Local river.*

some holding onto a exciting flag
and some going stealthily in their purpose.

But here I stand alone
my back towards meanness,
recognizing the voice of despair
of the silent night.

Do you remember
if there was a world once?
And the buying and selling
of those scheming men?
When the hills shut their red eyes
around Khandagiri,*
from which tree's hollows
were the bird cries heard?

From inside the colours and brightnesses
of yesterday and tomorrow
I'll simply write dipping my finger in my blood
whatever has to be written
and all
that has not been written still.

**Local hill on the west side of Bhubaneshwar.*

A Day With A Fairy

Her greatest offence
is that she remains despondent
about her good qualities.

The other day a fairy
flying past in the sky
came down on my roof,
her wings studded with diamonds
flapped open and shut
just as the veins do
at a lover's first touch.

Her entire being
trembling, burning, dying out,
the heart aflame, going out too
in a single drop of tear,
both eyes aflutter in uncertainty,
she looks around for a little place
to lean on for just a moment!

Blood, blood spilt everywhere
and not even a handful of water anywhere,
with belligerence, bullets and bombs
and the streets in total disarray.

Maybe she was there at midnight
wandering through the city,
maybe she had spread out her wings
and covered the naked children
crouched and asleep in street corners
under the rain and dew.

Come, dear fairy, and I held her hand
come in, I have food and water in my house
a bed with mosquito netting too —
suddenly her face crumbled and changed
as though in harsh neglect.

But where is your sleep, where are your dreams?

You wish to acquire everything, you said,
I have a deficiency you know
I am very simple —
this attire of gems and diamonds
is merely an outer wrap, nothing more,
for my heart bursts in pain
when I see a sorrowful face.

This rat race is a breathless one,
where are the flowers, where are the scents?
the air is aflame,
and you have decorated your courtyard
with pieces of regret.
So now, just let me leave—



Dr. (Mrs.) Pratibha Satpathy, an eminent poet of Indian literature has been writing poetry in Oriya for the last forty years. She has nine collections of her poems and also a number of books of literary criticisms and translations.

For her literary excellence, she has received many awards including that of 'Orissa Sahitya Academy', 'Central Sahitya Akademi' and 'Critic Circle of India'.

Presently, she serves as a professor of Oriya language and literature and stays at Bhubaneshwar.

This is her first book of poems in English Translation.

"The Inner voice in Pratibha Satpathy's poetry profoundly celebrates love, faith and endurance while her lucid and lyric expression casts a magic spell on her readers. Her language is simple, unadorned yet profoundly charged with feelings"

Indian Express, April 2002

"The myth in her poetry seeks it's human relevance and becomes a source of self discover, and the unveiling of the fundamental truth of human existence"

Indian Literature, Young. Poets' Special, 1993

"Her poetry provides fine examples of how best the continuing tension between time and existence can be resolved"...

Contemporary History & Culture